



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

News Release

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TWO U.S. CITIZENS CHARGED WITH SMUGGLING 5-YEAR-OLD *ICE special agents arrest smugglers after mother succumbs to heat*

OMAHA, Neb.—As a result of an investigation by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) special agents in Nebraska and New Mexico, two U.S. citizens have been charged by the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Nebraska with transporting a 5-year-old girl.

Theresa J. Perea, 32, and Michelle Urioste, 31, were criminally charged July 5 with one count each of transporting an illegal alien for private financial gain. If convicted, each faces up to 10 years' imprisonment and a fine of up to \$250,000.

According to a criminal complaint filed in the case, the investigation began June 29 near Hatch, New Mexico. A human smuggler attempted to bring a group of four illegal aliens, including a 5-year-old girl, into the United States. One of the aliens, the mother of the girl, became ill because of the extreme heat. The smuggler led the group to a nearby highway, where his associates picked up the 5-year-old. The smuggler used a cell phone to call 911 and abandoned the remaining three adults.

According to the complaint, U.S. Border Patrol agents and local law enforcement officers responded to the 911 call, located the ill woman, and airlifted her to the nearest hospital.

The complaint states that ICE special agents and Border Patrol agents interviewed the two remaining adult illegal aliens and learned that the 5-year-old was being transported to Omaha, Neb. ICE special agents contacted the girl's father and he agreed to have his phone conversations with the smugglers recorded.

According to the complaint, the young girl's father met Perea and Urioste at his Omaha residence July 2. Money was exchanged, and ICE moved in and arrested both women.

In recent years, human smuggling gangs have descended on the Southwest border of the United States, building a lucrative industry by charging people substantial fees to be illegally smuggled into the country. To address this growing threat, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement launched Operation ICE Storm in the Phoenix, Ariz., and the surrounding area. ICE Storm is an

unprecedented multi-agency initiative to dismantle organized criminal outfits that have made human smuggling a profitable but bloody business venture.

Since its beginning in October 2003, ICE Storm has led to prosecuting more than 380 defendants on a wide range of violations, including: human smuggling, money laundering, kidnapping, hostage-taking, narcotics smuggling and possession, and illegal weapons possession. More than \$7.4 million in criminal currency has been seized from smuggling organizations, along with 302 weapons, including: handguns, AK-47s, and SKS military assault rifles. Furthermore, more than 8,700 illegal aliens have been apprehended in the Phoenix area.

In addition, ICE Storm has been credited with a significant drop in crime in the Phoenix area, with area police pointing to significant declines in the city's murder rate, sexual assaults, aggravated assaults, robberies, weapons seizures, and smuggling-related violence.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of five integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.